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ABSTRACT

This study sought to understand how children develop their gender identities by examining their social interactions in a school setting. It followed six children over the course of the school year at a university-run laboratory preschool, utilizing videotaped observations, field notes, and teacher interviews. Four of the targeted children's gender experiences are described and analyzed through verbatim examples from the videotapes. Both obvious and subtle gender experiences were identified from the positionings that the children constructed for themselves and those that were offered by others. Obvious positionings were identified as "feminine," "masculine," "identifying with peer culture," "participating in peer culture," and "pretending." Fifteen subtle gender positionings were observed, such as "affectionate," "aggressing," "attached," and "helping." Whereas some subtle positionings usually associated with females, such as "cooperating" and "playing with adults," were in fact observed more often in the males in this study, the majority of positionings followed expected gender associations. Overall, the study found that gender identity formation was integrated with other social processes, such as becoming a student and peer. (Contains 27 references.) (MDM)

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Gender Experiences in an Early Childhood Classroom Through an Ethnographic Lens

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Running Head: GENDER EXPERIENCES IN AN EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM

Gender Experiences in an Early Childhood Classroom Through an Ethnographic Lens

There are several theoretical perspectives that have attempted to explain sex-role and gender development. According to the psychological literature, the development of one's own understanding of gender has been attributed to biological, social, or cognitive factors (Coker, 1984; Condry, 1984; Kohlberg, 1966; Mischel, 1970; Moir & Jessel, 1991; Ruble, 1988; Slaby & Frey, 1975). These researchers have used quantitative methods and techniques to study gender development. In addition, they have studied gender in isolation from other developmental trends.

More recently, researchers have viewed sex-roles as complex and multiply determined (Davies, 1989; Ruble, 1988). This new way of studying gender lends itself to different methodologies than have been used in the past.

Contemporary theorists, such as Davies (1989), take a poststructuralist perspective on gender development. Poststructuralists contend that sex and gender are elements of the social structure (Davies, 1989). Masculinity and femininity are not inherent properties of the individual but are inherent or structural properties of our society - they both condition and arise from social action (Davies, 1989).

In this study, children's gender experiences were explored using a poststructuralist perspective of gender and a

sociocultural perspective of school. Researchers using the sociocultural perspective (Bloome, Puro, & Theodorou, 1989; Erickson, 1982; Green & Harker, 1982; Zaharlick & Green, 1991) assume that all members of a social group are cultural beings in that they share and have learned the customary patterns for engaging in everyday life.

This study was based on the belief that children co-construct their gender understanding through social interactions with others in their culture. In addition, this research was based on the belief that the school and classroom are cultures with patterned ways of perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting (Goodenough, 1964, 1970). Thus, children and teachers co-construct the classroom culture (Fernie et al., 1990) and peers largely co-construct the peer culture (Corsaro, 1985, 1988; Elgas, Klein, Kantor, & Fernie, 1988).

Specifically, the concept of "positioning," introduced by Davies (1989) and Walkerdine (1981), was used to show how becoming gendered, students, and peers was accomplished in the doing of everyday life in the preschool. Davies (1989) defined this concept as "possible ways of being." Positionings are fluid and dynamic "ways of being" (Davies, 1989, Walkerdine, 1981), as opposed to roles which are static and enduring. In their interpretations, positionings were primarily related to power and dominance, and therefore, related to gender. For example, males are positioned as powerful, controlling, and dominant in our culture; whereas, females are positioned as powerless and

submissive. This concept was used to define categories related to becoming gendered, a student, and a peer that emerged from the data. The conceptual framework relating to the integration of these processes originated in a collaboration among researchers (Fernie, Kantor, Davies, & McMurray, 1993; McMurray, 1992).

The purpose in the study was to examine the ways in which young children experience what it means to be gendered using an ethnographic perspective. In addition, emphasis was placed on how social processes were infused into the daily life of the preschool and how becoming gendered, a student, and a peer were integrated and occurred simultaneously. As part of a larger study, the research results discussed below describe the gender experiences of the three- and four-year-old children observed during an ethnographic study of an early childhood classroom. By observing children as they construct and conduct their everyday lives, the researcher gained insight into the gender issues that children were experiencing.

The Data

The study took place in a laboratory preschool located in a public, land grant university in the Midwest. The primary data source for this study was videotapes. Sixteen days from a year-long ethnography, for a total of 96 hours of viewing, were selected for analysis in this study. Field notes, teacher retrospective notes, and interviews with teachers were used for clarification of specific events and analysis verification. The lead teachers, Rebecca and Donna, in the preschool provided

information on the children throughout the collection of data and data analysis. Finally, the researcher attended research meetings, on the average of once a week, where a contextualization process took place; i.e., a process of building familiarity with the classroom and research procedures.

Six children (from a total of 19), two girls and four boys, represented the targeted subjects for observation and analysis. These children were selected from the population of children enrolled in the school because of their varied positionings as students, peers, and gendered persons which were determined from previous studies and the ethnographic history of this classroom. In addition, their differing positionings provide a basis for comparison across individuals.

Procedures

In order to describe the gender, student, and peer positionings that children experience in preschool, a topic-centered, ethnographic perspective with its concomitant ethnographic tools, was used. The study was embedded within a comprehensive ethnography of the preschool classroom characterized by a series of linked, mutually-informing analyses. For the present study, an ethnographic perspective was used to describe how children experience their gender.

The researcher used a purposeful sampling technique to identify the videotapes to be analyzed in depth.
The first sweep of videotapes were viewed using an observation sheet which identified each of the targeted children along with

information such as the tape deck number/day, activity, quarter/date, page number, date of observation, a reference column, and a comments/summaries column. The target children were tracked throughout the day and running descriptions were made for each context (e.g., circle time, small groups, snack, and freeplay). Next, using the same observation sheet, these descriptions were condensed into descriptive positionings. For example, if a child was helping a teacher and other children clean-up the block area, he/she was given the positioning of "Helping." The positionings were listed in the column corresponding to the child.

If the child positioned him/herself, then the positioning was recorded with a brief summary of the situation in which the child demonstrated the positioning. The reaction of the other person or people to the child's self-positioning, whether it was explicitly accepted, explicitly rejected, implicitly accepted, no reaction, or other reaction, was recorded immediately following the positioning. If the child was positioned by someone else, then the following notation was used: ST (student teacher) ----> helping - summary - accepted, rejected, or no reaction, with explanation. Positionings were identified directly, as opposed to a running description of events, for the remaining videotapes. The researcher attempted to be inductive and descriptive of the behaviors exhibited by the children through the labelling of the different positionings. It was possible for more than one positioning to be given to a specific behavior or for a

positioning to fit into more than one domain -- gender, student, and/or peer.

Interpretations

The targeted children's gender experiences were described and analyzed through verbatim examples from the videotapes, domain analyses (Spradley, 1980), and frequency tables. The following sections describe: (1) four individuals and their gender experiences; (2) the integration of gender with the school and peer domains; and (3) obvious and subtle gender positionings that emerged from the data.

Individual Gender Experiences

Lisa. Lisa was three-years-old and the youngest child in her family. She had one sister, who was 17 years old, from her father's first marriage. Her mother and father lived together and were 36 and 52 years old, respectively. Lisa's mother was a registered nurse and student at the University. Her father was a physician at the University Hospital. This was Lisa's second experience in a group setting (she had previously attended a play group). Lisa was one of two girls in the sample for this study.

Rebecca, one of the lead teachers, indicated that "Lisa was a pretty little girl, slender, quiet, quite compliant and easy going." Rebecca remembered that, as time passed, Lisa exhibited "a very funny, more out going, teasing sense of humor."

In the following example, Lisa negotiates positionings in the block area. This example illustrates how Lisa negotiated positionings and provides information for a discussion of how

Lisa constructed herself as a student, peer, and gendered person.

Example 1:

Student Teacher: You guys playing cowboys or something?
Bob: We're playing gunnermen [as he walked away carrying a stick and wearing a cowboy hat].

Lisa watched the boys for a long time and then found herself a stick. Paul ran past Lisa.

Paul: Bang, Bang!
Lisa: Bang, Bang!

Lisa turned to the student teacher and another child and pointed her stick at them.

Student Teacher: Ah, Lisa's got one, too.

Lisa pointed her stick at Paul and Kevin.

Lisa: Bang, Bang!
Paul: Get out of here. Get out of here. You can't get me. Bang! Bang! Bang [to Lisa]!

Lisa pointed her stick at him and Kevin then turned and pointed her stick at the student teacher.

Lisa: Bang! Bang!
Student Teacher: Bang [to Lisa]!
Paul: Bangleader? Leader [to Kevin]? Leader?

Paul: Banglady! Banglady [from the top of the climber while looking in Lisa's direction]!
Ken: Banglady [pointing his stick at another boy in the block area while laughing]!
Lisa: I'm a gunnerman!
Paul: Bang [as Lisa walks by]!
Student Teacher: I'm a gunnerman, too. [10/15- L009]

Lisa was positioned by Paul as "Pretending" and "Feminine" when he called her "banglady." She rejected the positioning of "Feminine" and positioned herself as "Masculine," "gunnerman."

In addition, Paul positioned Lisa as "Participating in Peer Culture" when he called her by a character's name related to the ongoing play theme and shooting her with stick guns. Lisa did not reject being positioned as "Participating in Peer Culture," she used her stick to shoot back at Paul and the other boys and seemed to be quite interested in their play. This episode was similar to others that were witnessed by teachers. As the teacher, Rebecca, remembered:

> She also became a pretend gun-toting member of the exciting group of boys in the room. She would play right in there with them, in the middle of their rough and tumble play in the block corner. It was funny to hear her shout things like "Quick! We need to save the ship!." (personal communication, November, 1991)

The teacher accepted Lisa as her play partner when she "shot" Lisa and when she indicated that she was "a gunnerman, too." This behavior from a teacher in another preschool might not be accepted, but the teachers in this preschool were willing to support children's choices in the kind of play themes in which they were interested.

What was more interesting about this example, and more relevant to understanding how Lisa constructed herself as a person, was the salient gender issue present in the interaction. Peer culture and gender understanding intersected in Example 1. Lisa wanted to be accepted by the dominant peer culture which was co-constructed by the boys. As it turned out, many girls were

interested in this group of boys, but Lisa had regular access and membership. She used the right materials in the right way to gain access to this peer constructed game. Lisa appeared to understand what it takes to be a part of the peer culture and what positionings were important to the group. Also, Lisa wanted to be seen as having equal power and status in the group and to be recognized as a "gunnerman." She did not want to be distinguished by her sex. This is evident from the interview with Donna, one of the lead teachers, who indicated that she remembered Lisa as a child that was comfortable both in traditionally feminine roles and traditionally masculine roles.

Maria. Maria was an only child and appeared to be immature for being just two months shy of four-years-old. Her mother was 37 and her father was 34 and were living together. Maria's immaturity, which was evident during school hours when she constantly twirled her hair and sucked her fingers, was explained after reading her file and finding that she was still nursing at night and usually slept with her parents. However, she did have some experience in group play settings with a babysitter and in a Montessori school. Like Lisa, the teacher, Rebecca, described Maria as "an extremely easy child to live with." Rebecca remembered her as being "very mild-mannered, gentle, quiet, and sensitive." Maria was the only other girl, besides Lisa, in the sample.

Maria showed less diversity in positionings, especially in gender positionings, than Lisa. Maria did not seem to be as

involved as Lisa was in gender related activities. One of the teachers, Donna, viewed Maria as a acting as "feminine" as Lisa acted "masculine." If Maria were involved, then they were typically traditional feminine activities (e.g., housekeeping or art activities). When she positioned herself as "Identifying with Peer Culture" by bringing a toy to group it was a doll or purse.

Unlike Lisa, she was not interested in the core group of boys. She positioned herself as "Masculine" two times, whereas Lisa positioned herself as "Masculine" 26 times (see Table 1). Maria positioned herself as "Feminine" 31 times and Lisa positioned herself as "Feminine" 10 times. Therefore, Maria was not experiencing gender in the same way that Lisa was. They were both constructing themselves as gendered persons with relatively similar quantities of gender-related positionings, but experiencing it in different ways. It was the content of their positionings (one traditional, the other innovative) which made Maria appear less active in gender terms then Lisa.

Nate. Nate was the third of five children in the family and was four-years-old. His father was an architect and his mother a student in the School of Music at the University. Nate's attendance in the preschool was his first school experience. The teacher, Rebecca, described Nate as "an adorable boy but very needy."

Nate positioned himself in a wide range of gender positionings. In the following example, Nate accepted the

positioning of "Mom," Bob became a hunter, and William appeared to be the father as they constructed a play scenario in the housekeeping area.

Example 2:

Nate and William were in the housekeeping area together.

William: What do you want for dinner?
Nate: Huh?
William: What do you want for dinner?

Nate goes to the refrigerator and opens it. William follows.

William: What do you want for breakfast?
Nate: We're having eggs. We just need two eggs and we need and we need some water and we need some (inaudible).
Bob: Hi Ma (pause) Hi Mom.
Nate: I I I'm the Mom.
Bob: Hi Mom. I've got alot of guns, okay (carrying a bunch of sticks)?
Nate: Okay.
Bob: They're to shoot animals.
Nate: What?
Bob: I said they're to shoot animals so we can eat'em.
Nate: Thanks. Thanks alot.
William: Put'em right here (to Bob as he points to the table).
Bob: I'll put them in the cart (pointing to the baby buggy).
Nate: Dinner's ready (walking over to the table)! Now the rabbit is going to eat cauliflower.
Bob: Well, I'm goin' huntin', okay (sitting on the floor, rearranging the sticks)?
Nate: What (while taking care of the bunny)?
Bob: I'm goin' hunting.

Bob leaves the area and Nate shakes his head in approval. After a short time, Bob returns with a plastic elephant in his hand and gives it to Nate.

Nate: Thanks (as he examines the elephant).

Bob walks away. Nate walks over to William.

Nate: He caught one elephant (pause) honey.
William: What?
Nate: He caught one elephant. (10/23 - K012)

As illustrated above, Nate was positioned by Bob as "the mom." Nate accepted this positioning and continued the positioning for a period of time during freeplay. However, as opposed to Bob who offered a "Feminine" positioning and positioned himself as "Masculine," a "hunter," Nate was often observed doing and playing in traditionally feminine ways.

In addition, Nate liked Barbies and dressing-up. The disturbing thing to the teachers about Nate's interest in dressing-up was that he hid it from the others in the classroom, seeming to be ashamed of wanting to dress-up in "girl's" clothing. One of the teachers, Rebecca, remembered that:

> His mom worried a little about his interest in trying on women's clothes. We tried to reassure her; we worried too, not because he tried on the clothes but because he had picked up a shame feeling about it. He would take the girls' dress-up clothes and hide in the bathroom or the climber to try them on. (personal communication, November, 1991)

Donna, the other teacher, also indicated that the most salient positionings that Nate exhibited were related to gender. She stated that she remembered that he hid when dressing-up and that the teachers were very concerned. However, Nate was also observed participating in traditionally masculine activities. Thus, these varied positionings showed that Nate, similar to Lisa, had a wide range of gender positionings available to him. At the same time, while Nate did not exhibit a greater quantity

of gender positionings than most of the other children, it was the content of his gender positionings that determined their salience.

Bob. As the oldest of four boys in the family, Bob was four-years-old. His youngest brother was a newborn. His mother was a homemaker and his father a medical student. This was Bob's first school experience. The teacher, Rebecca, remembered him as:

> ...a very funny boy - a real character. He was small for his age, with a round cherubic, angelic face. He was a favorite of the staff because he was so creative, and such a character. He had this funny way of talking out of the side of his mouth like Popeye. (personal communication, November, 1991)

Bob's gender positionings were very interesting. He was usually playing games with aggressive and violent themes. The other teacher, Donna, remembered Bob as being as stereotypically masculine as Maria was stereotypically feminine. She stated that Bob was interested in rough and tumble play, which was common in the core peer group.

Yet, sometimes he was observed carrying a purse. It appeared, though, that the purse was not used in the same way as a female, for example Maria, would use it. He often carried "money," little metal washers, in the purse and it seemed that he would position himself as "Protecting" the materials. In other words, Bob used traditionally feminine toys and objects to meet

traditionally masculine goals, that of power and control. It was clear that the toys and objects that Bob found interesting and kept in his control were also the objects that the other boys in the group coveted. Therefore, just because children are observed with traditionally feminine or masculine objects does not imply that they are using them in traditional ways, and that these behaviors have been constructed in ways consistent with the traditional view of gender (e.g., consider males wearing earrings, a traditionally feminine artifact).

Integration of Gender with School and/or Peer Domains

Children experience becoming a gendered person at the same time as they are becoming a student and a peer. Thus, becoming a student, a peer, and a gendered person are integrated and occur simultaneously as children experience the social world of the preschool. Taking this line of thinking one step further, children can be viewed as gendered students and gendered peers.

Although, all of the children exhibited gender positionings during both student and peer activities, Lisa and Bob were observed integrating domains by positioning themselves as gendered persons more often than the others, e.g., when Lisa wanted to be called "Batman" during a circle dismissal game and/or when Bob brought a purse full of "money" (metal washers) to circle.

In the following example, children initiated the integration of peer and gender domains. In Example 3, Nate is teasing Ken for having "girl's toys." This seems to be one of the typical

ways for children to discuss gender in their peer culture.

Example 3:

Paul and Ken enter the small group area with toys. Nate carries a Barbie doll.

Nate: You have a girl's toy. You have a girl's toy [in a sing song, teasing voice].

Ken does not respond.

Nate: You have a girl's toy. You have a...[Ken interrupts].
Ken: No I don't [in a loud and mean voice].

Nate shakes his head yes.

Ken: It's not a girl's toy. I just like potato head kids.
Nate: I like Barbies.
Paul: Ohhhhh. You have a girl's toy [to Nate].

Nate looks at Paul but does not respond. He gets a chair for Rebecca who is coming toward them.

Ken: The potato head kids are my...are my babies [he yells].

Ken shows his toys to Jack. [1/22 - H007]

Children often teased each other about the toys that they played with and especially about toys that were associated with gender. In this interaction, Nate teased Ken, positioned himself as "Teasing," about his toys even though he had "girl's toys," too. Nate also positioned himself as "Participating in Peer Culture" by showing an interest in Ken's toys. Nate positioned Ken as "Feminine" and Ken rejected by positioning himself as "Protecting." Then, Nate positioned himself as "Feminine," by saying that he liked Barbies. Through negotiations of positionings like this one, children construct themselves as

peers and gendered persons.

This interaction is an example of how peer and gender domains are integrated and occur simultaneously. The children were getting ready for small group which is often when peer interests and issues were observed. Nate was addressing a peer issue when he teased Ken about his toys. When the toys were associated with gender, Nate incorporated the gender domain.

A similar situation occurred when a group of children were having snack. Two girls were sitting at a table with several boys. One of the boys said that it was "an all boys table." Jack said this when two of his peer culture friends were present. Maria, one of the two girls present at the time, objected. Paul agreed with Maria and told Jack that it was a girl's table, too. What is interesting here is that Paul was a prominent peer culture player. It appeared that Jack was trying to build solidarity between himself and the other boys at the table by referring to their similarity of gender. After Maria stood her ground and Paul supported her stance, Jack dropped the subject. Jack was integrating his peer culture interest of being part of the group by referring to gender, i.e, Jack integrated peer and gender domains.

Other examples of the integration of peer and gender domains occurred when children would separate themselves from other children because of gender. Example 4 illustrates this situation within a school culture activity, thus, it is an example of the integration across all three domains, student, peer, and gender.

The children have just arrived to small group when the following events took place.

Example 4:

Several children have brought toys to group today. Wendy comments that she would like to show what she has in her backpack. Donna allows Wendy to share her bean bag doll and asks to hold it because it looks soft. Wendy passes it to Donna. Andy, who is sitting beside Donna, leans toward the doll.

Wendy: She, he can't hold one. Not boys.
Donna: No boys can hold your dolly?

Two of the children say they are girls, so Donna passes the doll to them.

Donna: What do you think the boys are feeling if they don't get to hold it and be like a daddy to it?

The conversation turns to talking about family and the names of family members. Then, Donna asks Dennis how he feels about not holding the doll. Dennis does not respond orally but he frowns and looks displeased. Donna asks the group what they should do because some people are being left out and are sad. Wendy offers her popple [stuffed animal] to the boys. Donna says the boys do not want to hold the popple, "they really want to touch the doll." Wendy offers her pony. Again, the boys refuse. Wendy repeats that the boys can't touch her doll. Donna continues to question the children about a way to solve this problem.

During this interaction William has been observing Wendy and Dennis. Finally, William offers his dinosaur to Dennis, who accepts, then indicates "only boys can touch my dinosaur." Wendy looks sad and frowns. Donna notices that Wendy feels sad about the dinosaur and the boys are sad about the doll. Wendy says that the boys can touch her doll, so Donna passes the doll to Dennis and William gives his dinosaur to Donna and she passes it to Wendy. Donna asks if everyone feels better. Andy indicates the he "doesn't feel better, nothing...no way Jose." Donna continues with small group discussion. [4/6 - L001 and Spring Fieldnotes - 4/6 - Donna's small group]

In the interaction above, Wendy positioned herself as "Protecting" and the boys as "Intruding." She also positioned herself as "Feminine," by bringing the doll to group, "Identifying with Peer Culture," by bringing toys to small group, and "Participating in Peer Culture," by allowing only the girls in the group to touch the doll. Wendy positioned the boys as "Masculine" by not allowing them to participate in the sharing of her doll because they were boys. The teacher, Donna, positioned all of the children as "Helping" and "Informing" when she asked them for suggestions on how to solve the problem. This series of negotiations involved positionings from all three domains. "Helping" and "Informing," in the context of small group, a school culture activity, are student positionings. "Participating in Peer Culture" and "Identifying with Peer Culture" are peer positionings. "Feminine" and "Masculine" are gender positionings. Through negotiations of positionings, similar to the one described in Example 4, children simultaneously construct themselves as students, peers, and gendered persons.

In a another, slightly different, interaction during Rebecca's small group, student, peer, and gender domains appeared to be integrated. On this particular day, Rebecca read a book called <u>William's Doll</u>. One of the children, Bob, said he didn't like that book. After Rebecca finished reading, she indicated to Nate, who had brought his doll to group that day, that he had a "Barbie to love and practice being a daddy...just like William."

This event took place during a school culture activity. The discussion of the book revolved around gender issues. Bringing toys to group was a way of identifying with peer culture. All three domains were incorporated into this interaction.

Nate positioned himself as "Feminine" by playing with a doll and as "Identifying with Peer Culture" by bringing a toy to group. Rebecca supported Nate's self-positioning of "Feminine" when she related his experience to the experience that William had in the book. She indicated, through her words and tone of voice, that it was acceptable for boys to love dolls because they might be daddies someday. The implicit message that Rebecca sent was that whether a person is nurturing or not is not related to their sex. In other words, it is just as acceptable for boys to be nurturing as it is for girls. Therefore, there are both obvious and subtle ways that children experience and are exposed to gender.

Obvious and Subtle Gender Experiences

Both obvious and subtle gender experiences, which emerged from the data, were identified from the positionings that children constructed for themselves and those that are offered by others. Obvious gender experiences emerge when children overtly position themselves as "Feminine" and "Masculine." By carrying a toy or behaving in a way that is traditionally characteristic of a boy or girl, children express themselves as a gendered person.

Children learn what is expected of them as a gendered person through negotiations of positionings and interactions with

others. For example, if a girl positions herself as "Masculine" by carrying sticks and using them as guns, then her self-positioning is rejected, she receives a message that it is not acceptable for her to position herself in that way. A child's choice to position him/herself counter conventionally becomes more difficult when his/her attempts are met with resistance. Children experience many negotiations, such as this one, as they continually construct themselves as gendered persons.

The children in this study positioned themselves and were positioned by others in five obvious gender positionings. Table 1 lists the five positionings, which were "Feminine," "Masculine," "Identifying with Peer Culture," "Participating in Peer Culture," and "Pretending." "Identifying with Peer Culture" was an obvious gender positioning when children possessed toys that are traditionally associated with being a girl or a boy. When children pretended to be a certain character associated with gender, e.g., Batman, in an ongoing play theme, "Participating in Peer Culture" and "Pretending" were obvious gender positionings.

Children's construction of themselves as gendered persons can be revealed by examining these obvious gender positionings. For example, in Table 1 it can be seen that obvious gender positionings were recorded 1018 times. Overall, Bob had more obvious gender experiences than any of the other children with a total of 286 (28%) positionings. When examining each positioning, it becomes clear that Bob positioned himself and/or was positioned by others in obvious gender positionings more

often than the other children. Bob had 39% of the "Masculine" positionings, 34% of the "Identifying with Peer Culture" positionings, and 36% of the "Pretending" positionings. Maria experienced the most "Feminine" positionings with 38% and Jack experienced the most "Participating in Peer Culture" positionings with 29%. Regardless of the actual number of times that these children were observed in obvious gender positionings, it is clear that all of them were constructing themselves through the negotiation of positionings as gendered persons.

As mentioned, children also experience subtle gender positionings. Subtle gender positionings are those positionings that can be related to traditional views of what it means to be a male or female. For instance, aggressiveness is often associated with males and affection and nurturing are typically associated with females. They are the positionings that reveal stereotypical characteristics.

Table 2 is a list of the subtle gender positionings that were identified in these data. There were 15 subtle gender positionings identified for a total of 1931 times. In general, Bob experienced the most (469 or 24%) subtle gender positionings.

The girls and boys in this sample can be compared by examining specific positionings. For example, over 50% of the "Affectionate" positionings were experienced by the two girls in the study. Keeping in mind that there were four boys as opposed to only two girls, this is a large percentage. One hundred percent of the "Aggressing" positionings were experienced by the

boys, 61% of those were Bob's positionings. Over 80% of the "Non-Complying" positionings were experienced by the boys, 33% and 30% of those were Nate's and Bob's positionings, respectively. The pattern of other positionings, "Bragging," "Directing," "Intruding," "Mock Aggressing," "Mock Hurt," and "Protecting," which are traditionally associated with males indicated a similar trend. Although, one of the girls, Lisa, experienced many of these traditionally male positionings.

It was interesting that "Cooperating" and "Playing with Adults," often associated with females, were more often experienced by the boys than the girls. Other subtle gender positionings, "Attached" and "Helping," typically associated with females, were more evenly distributed. However, these findings could be due to the uneven number of boys and girls in the sample.

"Socially Responsible" was a positioning that was offered primarily by teachers when children were not following the rules or were doing something that was not safe. Boys were more likely than girls to be offered this positioning. This is not surprising in that stretching the limits of school rules and authority is often associated with male behavior. The remaining subtle gender positioning, "Self-Sufficient," was more evenly distributed among the boys and girls. This was not unexpected due to the fact that teachers in this preschool classroom promoted, the development of independence and self-control.

From a feminist perspective, gender experiences are related

to power and control issues. Power and control has been associated with males. Some researchers have indicated that in early childhood, children, both boys and girls, exhibit these behaviors. However, when girls exert power and control, it is stifled by adults. When boys exert power and control it is encouraged or ignored by adults.

Children in this preschool were observed experiencing power and control during their everyday lives. This power and control over their social worlds was not exclusively associated with being a boy. Subtle gender experiences can be examined by identifying the children's self-positionings and positionings that are offered to them by others. In the following example, Wendy, a three-year-old girl, with another girl as her ally, exerts power and control over the situation and over the two boys that are playing with them at the sandtable. Positionings are in parentheses.

Example 5:

Dennis, wearing a cape, Wendy, Lori, and Paul are playing at the sandtable. They are working in their own corners of the table and it appears that they are not communicating very much.

Lori: I,m going to scoop the gooey stuff out and onto that plate [as she scoops the sand over toward Dennis' side of the table].

Dennis: NO! (Protecting)

Wendy throws a handful of sand toward Dennis (Aggressing). He steps back from the table and looks at himself and the floor.

Paul: AHHH, who did that? I didn't do it.

Dennis: You, you did it [to Wendy]. And you got some on the floor.

Dennis leaves. While he is gone, Lori leans over toward Wendy and whispers something in her ear.

Paul: Did he do it to her?
Lori: Yeah. Right? Right? Right, Wendy? He told [inaudible]...you, too [to Wendy who continues to play in the sand]. (Participating in Peer Culture)
Paul: I wasn't laughin'.
Wendy: No [as she shakes her head].

Dennis comes back and cleans up the floor with a paper towel, then starts playing in the sand again. Wendy throws sand toward him (Aggressing).

Dennis: DON'T! (Protecting)
Paul: I wasn't doin' it.

Dennis leaves. While he is gone, Rebecca comes over to the sandtable.

Rebecca: What are you guys doing?
Paul: I wasn't doin' it.

Wendy has a guilty look on her face. Rebecca explains that it is okay to add water to the sand. Rebecca leaves and Lori follows. Dennis returns.

Paul: Who'd you tell?
Dennis: Nobody.

They all go back to playing in the sand. [10/23 - H012]

In this interaction, Wendy positioned herself as "Aggressing" by throwing sand at Dennis. This act appeared to be unprovoked since the reaction that Dennis exhibited was one of surprise and astonishment. Dennis positioned himself as "Protecting" when he told Wendy "No." Later, Wendy repeated the behavior and received a similar response from Dennis.

One of the interesting things about this situation is Paul's reaction when Wendy threw the sand. Both Paul and Dennis were surprised and astonished that Wendy would do "such a thing." It

was unusual for Wendy to act aggressively toward others in the school. While she was not one of the target children in this study, it was noted by the observer that Wendy was usually a very quiet, easy-going "little girl." As was illustrated in a previous example, Wendy promoted herself as a "girl." She carried dolls and purses, and rarely permitted "boys" to play with her toys. She seemed to be very clear about her role as a girl. In this interaction, Wendy is exhibiting aggressive behavior which is typically associated with boys. She takes control of the sandtable by throwing sand at Dennis and making him leave.

By observing children as they construct and conduct their everyday lives, the researcher can gain insight into the gender issues and experiences that children are experiencing. The identification of obvious and subtle gender positionings, and the negotiation of these positionings, reveal how children construct themselves as gendered persons.

Conclusions and Implications

This study revealed that gender experiences in early childhood are the result of an individual interacting with her/his social world. This is evident from the individual profiles of Lisa, Maria, Nate, and Bob and the reactions of adults, whether they supported or inhibited specific positionings, in the environment. Children participated in the construction of the social world as well as created different individual pathways through these social worlds; thus, the

negotiation of positionings is both social and individual. In other words, it is the interaction of an individual child with s the social world that enables him/her to construct themselves as a person, and in particular a gendered person.

In this study, gender experiences were revealed using ethnographic methods. The sociocultural and poststructuralist perspectives revealed the obvious and subtle gender experiences of young children as a dynamic process. By studying children's positionings in the preschool, children's gender experiences were observed as they conducted their everyday lives in the preschool.

There are two important implications of the findings for research on gender development. First, in this study, naturalistic observation was used to study gender. In the past researchers have studied children's gender development in contrived situations. That is, children have often been studied in the laboratory. The results of the research conducted in this way are extensive. Boys and girls differ in their toy preferences, where they prefer to play in the classroom, classroom activities, themes of play, and play mates (see review by Liss, 1986). Parents, peers, and teachers are some of the many social influences on children's sex-typed play behaviors (Liss, 1986). In addition, the media, other family members, and society at large can and do influence children's gender-role behaviors (Liss, 1986).

While many of these results were collected by observation, the behavioral constructs that were used were numerically

analyzed. One of the differences in this study and previous studies lies in the research method. In this study, children were studied ethnographically. Data were collected as children constructed and conducted their daily lives in the preschool. Also, an ethnographic history or a comprehensive ethnography was available to the researcher that informed her of the background information on the children that were being studied. The knowledge which the researcher gained from prior analyses of the preschool and the children informed this study. For example, Elgas (1988) identified the salient core group of boys in which Lisa was the only girl to obtain access. Therefore, Lisa became an important part of this study. All of the previous analyses provided vital information about the children. This study would not have been accomplished without this larger understanding of the preschool and the children.

A very important difference between this study and previous studies is the nature of the questions that can be answered. In the naturalistic paradigm, such as the one used for this study, questions or problems emerge from the data. This allows a researcher to concern herself with situated questions such as "how children experience gender" and "what gender experiences do children have." The questions address the process as opposed to the product of gender development.

This orientation leads to situated meanings. For example, children might play with toys which are related to traditional gender stereotypes, but use them in very non-traditional ways.

For instance, Bob was observed playing with a "girl's" toy, a purse. However, Bob did not use the purse in the traditional feminine sense. He used the purse for the power and control of resources, specifically, little metal washers that he called "money." Therefore, he used the purse in a traditionally masculine way for the purpose of power and control. In contrast, Nate, who was also frequently observed playing in stereotypically feminine ways, enjoyed those activities for what they were, i.e., he enjoyed playing in typically feminine ways. He played with a doll because he liked dolls not because he was interested in controlling the resources or having power over the objects or the group.

Only by using sociocultural, postructuralist, and ethnographic perspectives, and using naturalistic observation of the children as they constructed their social world, would the process of "how" children experience gender and "how" they use objects and behaviors to experience gender be revealed. In addition, the concept of positionings provided the researcher with a lens that made it possible to identify this process and to discover both obvious and subtle ways in which children experience their gender.

Second, becoming gendered was found to be integrated with other social processes, namely, becoming a student and a peer. Another important implication of this study for research on gender development is the integration of gender experiences with other fundamental experiences in children's lives, such as

becoming a student and a peer. Most researchers of gender development do not explicitly explore how gender is being experienced at the same time as children are experiencing other aspects of becoming a person in our society. This study revealed that gender is not isolated from other processes and that in fact children accomplish becoming gendered at the same time that they are becoming students and peers.

The researcher discovered, through this study, that children simultaneously become a gendered person, student, and peer in the early childhood classroom. Gender experiences were found to be integrated with school culture and peer culture. For individual children, like Lisa and Nate, their gender experiences were striking as they negotiated their places in the school and peer cultures. Lisa and Nate were non-traditional in the gender positionings that they chose. In contrast, Maria, who was also experiencing her gender while constructing her place in the school and peer culture, experienced gender in a traditional, expected, way which allowed it to be easily accepted with little negotiation and to go unnoticed by teachers in the classroom.

Finally, the findings of this study have implications for teachers of young children. Teachers should allow children to experience gender in their own individual ways and support and encourage children to seek their individual pathways through school. While gender experiences are salient in all preschools in some form or another, it is important for teachers to allow children to experience gender in their own individual ways. To

do this teachers must consciously set aside their gender biases and previous socialization by supporting children in their gender choices. For example, the teachers in this preschool supported Lisa as she experienced masculine activities and supported Nate as he experienced feminine activities. By allowing children to be the person that they want to be, and be the gendered person that they want to be, gender stereotypes can begin to be eliminated.

By examining several social processes and how individual children integrate these processes through ethnographic methods, researchers can explain the complexity at which children experience becoming a person.

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Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Obvious Gender Positionings by Child

Positioning	Child													
	Lisa		Maria		Dennis		Nate		Jack		Bob		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Feminine	10	12	31	38	3	4	22	27	1	1	15	18	82	100
Masculine	26	15	2	1	36	20	13	7	33	18	71	39	181	100
Identifying with Peer Culture	42	16	36	14	37	14	31	12	27	10	88	34	261	100
Participating in Peer Culture	57	13	50	11	53	12	61	14	125	29	92	21	438	100
Pretending	9	16	2	3	10	18	8	14	7	13	20	36	56	100
Total	144	14	121	12	139	14	135	13	193	19	286	28	1018	100

Table 2

Frequencies and Percentages of Subtle Gender Positionings by Child

Positioning	Child													
	Lisa		Maria		Dennis		Nate		Jack		Bob		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Affectionate	13	25	17	33	6	11	4	8	3	6	9	17	52	100
Aggressing	0	0	0	0	10	30	3	9	0	0	20	61	33	100
Attached	45	18	70	29	28	11	38	16	20	8	44	18	245	100
Bragging	4	14	0	0	0	0	5	17	12	41	8	28	29	100
Cooperating	0	0	1	17	2	33	0	0	1	17	2	33	6	100
Directing	7	7	15	15	15	15	29	29	26	25	9	9	101	100
Helping	51	14	87	25	62	17	66	19	52	15	35	10	353	100
Intruding	8	10	5	6	14	17	16	20	15	18	24	29	82	100
Mock Agressing	21	23	0	0	15	16	1	1	4	5	50	55	91	100
Mock Hurt	6	19	0	0	2	6	2	6	3	10	19	59	32	100

Table 2 (continued)

Positioning	Child													
	Lisa		Maria		Dennis		Nate		Jack		Bob		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Non-Complying	9	5	12	6	34	19	62	33	13	7	56	30	186	100
Playing with Adults	14	17	1	1	9	11	18	22	11	13	29	36	82	100
Protecting	15	9	15	9	25	16	37	24	20	13	46	29	158	100
Self-Sufficient	29	18	42	26	38	24	20	13	16	10	14	9	159	100
Socially Responsible	17	5	20	6	93	29	63	20	25	8	104	32	322	100
Total	239	12	285	15	353	18	364	19	221	12	469	24	1931	100